

Sūrah Balad

Central Theme, Relationship with the Preceding Sūrah

This *sūrah* forms a pair with Sūrah Fajr, the previous *sūrah*. There is no essential difference between the central theme of both *sūrahs*. In the previous *sūrah*, man is corrected on a misconception: when he receives a favour, he is overcome with pride and conceit thinking that this was his right and that God has actually honoured him; on the other hand, when he is faced with some trial, he starts to despair and becomes sad thinking that he has been denied a right and that he has been humiliated by God. The truth of the matter is that both these circumstances are neither meant to honour him nor to humiliate him: through both, the Almighty actually tests his perseverance and sense of showing gratitude to Him. In this regard, the correct attitude is that neither should a person show pride on receiving a favour nor should he despair and become dejected if he is deprived of it; when he receives a favour, he should express gratitude to God and should share this favour with the needy and when he is faced with hardships, then instead of complaining and brooding and blaming God, he should accept this fate whole-heartedly and show perseverance. A person who adopts this attitude is a person whose soul is at peace and will be blessed with what is stated thus in Sūrah Fajr: رَاضِيَةً مَّرْضِيَّةً (٢٨:٨٩) (they will be happy with their Lord and their Lord will be happy with them, (89:28)).

In this *sūrah*, this formula is applied on the Quraysh and shown that at the time when Abrahām (sws) settled his son Ishmael (sws) in Makkah, it was not only devoid of resources of sustenance and livelihood, it was also devoid of peace and security. However, it was the result of the prayer which Abraham (sws) made for Ishmael (sw) and his progeny before the Almighty to bless them with resources of sustenance and with peace that soon the land not only became abundant with these resources, it also became so secure that harming even an animal came to be regarded as a sin what to speak of human beings. It was as a result of both these provisions that the progeny of Ishmael (sws) progressed and multiplied greatly here and assumed the leadership of the whole country. However, after receiving these favours, these people forgot their previous history. They are now overcome with the claim that whatever they have was their birthright. Spending in the way of God weighs down heavily upon them. They never learn lessons from incidents which happen in their lives. Their

tongues seldom sing the praises of their Lord and seldom express perseverance. Expressions of virtue and kindness also are not found in their conversation. Their wealth is spent for their own merry-making and other wasteful activities. None of them has the resolve to attain success in the Hereafter by making sacrifices for the welfare of the poor and the needy. All of them are treading the path that leads to Hell.

Since these verses belong to the early Makkan period, the address is generally by the words: *يَا أَيُّهَا الْإِنْسَانُ* (O man!) and the appeal found in them is upon humanitarian grounds and upon its natural norms.

Analysis of the Discourse

Following is the sequence of the discourse of the *sūrah*:

Verses (1-4): Testimony is presented from the early history of Makkah and that of the Ishmaelites on the fact that this land was absolutely barren and desolate; life here was very tough and exacting. However, as a result of the favour of God, the supplication made by Abraham (sws) and the blessings of the House of God, this land became safe and secure and its inhabitants were blessed with abundance in food resources.

Verse (5-7): As an obligation towards these favours and blessings of God, these people should have expressed gratitude to Him and lent support and help to the needy; on the contrary, when they are called to spend in the way of God, they cry out that they have already spent a fortune on this and how much more should they give. It is as if they think that the Almighty is not witnessing their wasteful spending.

Verses (8-17): These greedy and avaricious people are rebuked that the Almighty had given them eyes so that they could use them to learn the lessons of life, tongue and lips so that they could use them to urge people in helping the poor and needy and the awareness of good and evil so that they could fight the temptation to evil and do virtuous deeds, help in feeding the poor and profess faith and call people to be sympathetic and compassionate; however, after receiving all this, instead of serving their Lord, they ended up in servitude to their wealth and riches.

Verses (18-20): If these people had adopted the right path, they would have been entitled to great reward in the Hereafter; on the contrary, they rejected the revelations of the Almighty and earned the Fire of Hell for themselves.

Text and Translation

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

لَا أُقْسِمُ بِهَذَا الْبَلَدِ (١) وَأَنْتَ حِلٌّ بِهَذَا الْبَلَدِ (٢) وَوَالِدٍ وَمَا وَلَدَ (٣) لَقَدْ خَلَقْنَا

الْإِنْسَانَ فِي كَبَدٍ (٤) أَيْحَسِبُ أَنَّ لَنَا يَفْدِرَ عَلَيْهِ أَحَدٌ (٥) يَقُولُ أَهْلَكْتُ مَالًا لُبَدًا (٦) أَيْحَسِبُ أَنَّ لَمْ يَرَهُ أَحَدٌ (٧) أَلَمْ نَجْعَلْ لَهُ عَيْنَيْنِ (٨) وَلِسَانًا وَشَفَتَيْنِ (٩) وَهَدَيْنَاهُ النَّجْدَيْنِ (١٠) فَلَا اقْتَحَمَ الْعَقَبَةَ (١١) وَمَا أَدْرَاكَ مَا الْعَقَبَةُ (١٢) فَكُ رَقَبَةً (١٣) أَوْ إِطْعَامٌ فِي يَوْمٍ ذِي مَسْغَبَةٍ (١٤) يَتِيمًا ذَا مَقْرَبَةٍ (١٥) أَوْ مِسْكِينًا ذَا مَتْرَبَةٍ (١٦) ثُمَّ كَانَ مِنَ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَتَوَاصَوْا بِالصَّبْرِ وَتَوَاصَوْا بِالْمَرْحَمَةِ (١٧) أُولَئِكَ أَصْحَابُ الْمَيْمَنَةِ (١٨) وَالَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا بِآيَاتِنَا هُمْ أَصْحَابُ الْمَشْأَمَةِ (١٩) عَلَيْهِمْ نَارٌ مُّوصَدَةٌ (٢٠)

In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Ever Merciful.

No! I swear by this city – and you are its inhabitant – and by the father and his progeny that We created man in a state of hardship. (1-4)

Does he think that no one has power over him? He says: “I have wasted heaps of money.” Does he think that no one has seen him? (5-7)

Have We not given him two eyes and a tongue and two lips and not shown him the two ways? But he did not surmount the steep path. And what have you understood what this steep path is? Freeing of a slave or feeding, in days of famine, of an orphan near of kin or an indigent [down] in the dust – then he be of those who accepted faith and who counselled one another to be patient and sympathetic. These are the fortunate. And those who have denied Our revelations, it is they who are the unfortunate. The Fire shall close in on them. (8-20)

Explanation

لَا أَقْسِمُ بِهَذَا الْبَلَدِ (١)¹

The word لَا (no) occurs here the way it occurs in (١:٧٥) لَا أَقْسِمُ بِيَوْمِ الْقِيَامَةِ (No! I swear by the Day of Judgement, (75:1)) as well as it occurs in some other instances. I have already explained it. Here it is meant to negate a false notion of the addressees referred to in the previous *sūrah* and precedes the oath. It is mentioned in the previous *sūrah* that when people are blessed with status and affluence, they while regarding this to be a result of their own planning become conceited and express the fact that it was because of being highly regarded by God that they have been given more by Him than others. This erroneous view is refuted in the previous *sūrah* from a particular angle whilst here it is refuted from another angle. This refutation begins with لَا (no) which is actually disproving this false notion. In other words, so baseless and absurd is this notion that citing arguments for its absurdity is not even required before

1. No! I swear by this city.

disproving it. This style is found in every language and is adopted when the purpose is to express the absurdity of a view.

The oath sworn here is meant to bear witness to a claim mentioned ahead by the words (٤) لَقَدْ خَلَقْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ فِي كَبَدٍ. The words بِهِذَا الْبَلَدِ (this city) refer to the city of Makkah. In Sūrah Tīn, this city has been sworn by through the words (٣ : ٩٥) وَهَذَا الْبَلَدِ الْأَمِينِ (and this secure city bears witness, (95:3)). Like most other Qur'ānic oaths, this oath too has not been sworn by Makkah because it is a sacred place; it has been sworn to bear witness to a claim which is mentioned ahead.

وَأَنْتَ حِلٌّ بِهَذَا الْبَلَدِ (٢)²

This is a parenthetical sentence and is meant to emphasize the oath. The addressing pronoun in it can be both for the Prophet (sws) and for the Quraysh. In both cases, there will not be much difference in the interpretation of the verse. The implication is that it is not that the testimony of a far-flung area is being presented whose history and background need to be gauged by the Prophet (sws) or the Quraysh after some effort; both have lived here and are well aware of its past and present; this place is their cherished residence and sanctuary; its history is their own history; they are encountering all the circumstances of their lives in this very place; hence, they can fully assess whether whatever is being said to them is the truth or is an exaggeration or something artificial.

وَوَالِدٍ وَمَا وَلَدَ (٣)³

After the parenthetical sentence, this part is related to the oath mentioned in the first verse and actually completes it. The word وَاِلِد (father) obviously refers to Abraham (sws) and Ishmael (sws) and مَا وَلَدَ (his progeny) refers to the progeny of Ishmael (sws) which first settled in Makkah and later spread to all Arabia. The fact that the word وَاِلِد is not defined by the article *alif lām* can incorporate two meanings into it: it can connote grandeur and majesty and it can also connote scarcity and thereby include both Abraham (sws) and Ishmael (sws) into it. Similarly, the generality found in مَا وَلَدَ is meant to include all the Ishmaelites whatever be the branch from which they descend.

2. and you are its inhabitant.

3. And by the father and his progeny.

لَقَدْ خَلَقْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ فِي كَبَدٍ⁴

The word كَبَدٍ means “hardship” and “toil”. Though the word is general to include all human beings – and there are benefits of this generality – however, here it refers particularly to the foremost addressees of the Qur’ān: the Ishmaelites – specifically the Quraysh. The verse while alluding to the advent and settling down of their ancestors in Makkah and to their early history informs them that they should not think that the abundance of resources and sustenance they possess here at this time was always there or that these circumstances are the result of their own planning and ability. The fact of the matter is that when Abraham (sws) settled his son Ishmael (sws) in this land, it was totally barren and desolate as well as strife-ridden and insecure. People lived here like nomads and their life was full of toil and struggle. Their livelihood depended on their herds and every person was responsible for the protection of his life and of his herd. There was no system that could offer protection to people. When Abraham (sws) settled his son Ishmael (sws) in this barren piece of land, he prayed to the Almighty to bless his progeny with sustenance and resources of livelihood in it as well as with peace and security. It was a blessing of this very prayer that resources of livelihood became abundant and because of their custodianship of the House of God and because of the sanctity granted to this land by the Almighty in the sacred months the doors to trade through peaceful journeys opened. It was as a result of all this that their life of toil and struggle transformed into a life of ease and comfort. They were so overcome with pride and vanity on this life of ease and comfort that they ended up showing indifference to God and His Prophet (sws); they contended that what they received was their birthright and they could expend it in any manner they wanted to and that no one had any power to interfere with their freedom and merry-making.

In order to dispel this misconception of the Quraysh, the Qur’ān has cited the history of the House of God at various places and cautioned them that if they became rebellious after receiving these favours from God, they would only be inviting their doom by this attitude of theirs. Sūrah Ibrāhīm refers to this aspect thus:

وَإِذْ قَالَ إِبْرَاهِيمُ رَبِّ اجْعَلْ هَذَا الْبَلَدَ آمِنًا وَاجْنُبْنِي وَبَنِيَّ أَنْ نَعْبُدَ الْأَصْنَامَ رَبِّ إِنَّهُمْ أَضَلُّونَ كَثِيرًا مِّنَ النَّاسِ فَمَنْ تَبِعَنِي فَإِنَّهُ مِنِّي وَمَنْ عَصَانِي فَإِنَّكَ غَفُورٌ رَّحِيمٌ

4. that We created man in a state of hardship.

رَبَّنَا إِنِّي أَسْكَنْتُ مِنْ دُرِّيَّتِي بِوَادٍ غَيْرِ ذِي زَرْعٍ عِنْدَ بَيْتِكَ الْمُحَرَّمِ رَبَّنَا لِيُقِيمُوا
 الصَّلَاةَ فَاجْعَلْ أَفْنِدَةً مِّنَ النَّاسِ تَهْوِي إِلَيْهِمْ وَارْزُقْهُمْ مِّنَ الثَّمَرَاتِ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَشْكُرُونَ
 (١٤: ٣٥-٣٧)

And when Abraham prayed: “Lord! Make this a secure land. Protect me and my progeny from being contaminated with worshipping idols. Lord! These idols have led astray many people. So he who follows me is from my brethren and he who disobeys me, You are surely Forgiving and Merciful. Lord! I have settled some of my progeny in a barren piece of land near Your Sacred House O Lord that they may show diligence in the prayer. Incline the hearts of men towards them and provide them with the livelihood of fruits so that they may express gratitude. (14:35-37)

A deliberation on the above quoted verses reveals the following facts:

- The reason that Abraham (sws) settled from among his progeny Ishmael (sws) in a barren and desolate piece of land was that he could be protected from the environment of polytheism.
- Abraham (sws) built the House of God in this land so that his progeny could make it a centre of God’s worship. He also prayed that this centre of worship and his progeny should become a hub to which people turn.
- At that time, Makkah was a barren and infertile land and was also unsafe and insecure. So Abraham (sws) also prayed that its inhabitants be blessed with abundance in food provisions and become safe and secure.

The purpose of presenting all these details is that the status and riches the Quraysh had at the time of the advent of the last Prophet (sws) was neither due to their own planning nor because they were entitled to it as a tribe; whatever they have now is a result of Abraham’s prayer and of blessings of the House of God. This favour from God is conditional on certain obligations.⁵ These include worshipping the Almighty, completion of the objective for which the House of God was built and professing faith in the Prophet (sws) sent to them. If they abide by these conditions, they will remain in this status; otherwise all this will be confiscated from them.

For this very reason, the Almighty has demanded from the Quraysh in

5. It is evident from some other verses of the Qur’ān that the promise of the Almighty of granting leadership to Abraham (sws) was conditional. People who would not follow his ways were not promised this position.

Sūrah Quraysh that if they want to keep receiving the blessings of the House of God, the only way is to worship the God of this House. The implication is that if they do not do so, there is no reason for them to remain the custodians of this House and the recipients of its blessings:

لَا يَلَا فِ قُرَيْشٍ إِلَّا فِيهِم رِحْلَةُ الشَّتَاءِ وَالصَّيْفِ فَلْيَعْبُدُوا رَبَّ هَذَا الْبَيْتِ الَّذِي
أَظْعَمَهُمْ مِنْ جُوعٍ وَآمَنَهُمْ مِنْ خَوْفٍ (١٠٤: ١-٤)

Owing to the association the Quraysh have – the association they have with the winter and summer journeys. So, they should worship the Lord of this House who fed them in hunger and provided them with peace in fear. (104: 1-4)

أَيَحْسَبُ أَنْ لَنْ يَقْدِرَ عَلَيْهِ أَحَدٌ^٦

The verse implies that there is no reason for those who know the early history of this area to be misled by their current affluence that since they are so strongly rooted now no one can uproot them. The Being who blessed them with abundance in food resources in a barren and infertile land can destroy them anytime He wants to especially when they have not even fulfilled the objective for which they had been settled in this area and for which the prophet Abraham (sws) had prayed for them.

يَقُولُ أَهْلَكْتُ مَالًا لُبَدًا (٦) أَيَحْسَبُ أَنْ لَمْ يَرَهُ أَحَدٌ^٧

The previous verse unveils the mentality of people which resulted from their being blessed with status and with an abundance in wealth. This verse unveils the character of people which has emanated from this corrupted mentality.

A person who is overcome with conceit thinking that the wealth and status he has been blessed with was a result of his own planning and strategy or that it was his right by birth has no motivation left in him to spend in the way of God; therefore, he becomes indifferent not only to God but also to the Hereafter. In order to hide their miserliness, such people keep wailing and brooding before the needy about their long list of expenditures and try to prove to them that besides personal expenditures they have to spend so much for national and collective needs that in spite of vast income and resources they are barely able to

6. Does he think that no one has power over him?

7. He says: "I have wasted heaps of money." Does he think that no one has seen him?

live in these means. It is this very method they adopt to silence people who invite them to spend in the name of God and for a better place in the Hereafter. “We have already spent a lot in such heads; how much more should we spend?” is the question they pose to such people. The expression مَالًا لَبَدًّا means “great amount of wealth”.

The verse أَيْحَسِبُ أَنْ لَمْ يَرَهُ أَحَدٌ is an answer to such boastful people: they think that no one is observing their generosity. The fact of the matter is that God is observing everything they do. He knows very well that they don’t spend a dime and still brag about their generous spending. The implication of the verse is that one day the complete account of all these alleged spending will come before them and before other people too.

أَلَمْ نَجْعَلْ لَهُ عَيْنَيْنِ (٨) وَلِسَانًا وَشَفَتَيْنِ (٩) وَهَدَيْنَاهُ النَّجْدَيْنِ (١٠)⁸

These verses caution them that they are so engrossed in their worldly riches that they have not even properly used the two eyes God had blessed them with otherwise they would not have let go of the eternal kingdom of the Hereafter by becoming blind slaves to these trivial things: they could have attained it through this wealth which one day they would have to part with anyway; the love and lust for the trivial and the transient has made them oblivious to the eternal. These verses prod them: they should reflect that the Almighty had blessed them with two eyes so that they could observe their surroundings and see that on the one hand the Almighty has blessed them with wealth and status and on the other they can see that right below their nose are orphans and needy, poor and helpless, weak and sick, the physically handicapped and the deprived who have nothing to eat and nothing to wear. The reason that the Almighty has blessed them with eyes is that they observe all this around them and learn a lesson and become grateful to the Almighty: merely as a favour, He did not make them go through such trying circumstances; hence, as an obligation to these favours, they should have generously spent their money to fulfil the needs of the deprived lot – the money which was given in their custody by the Almighty with a share for such people.

In other words, the verse says that the real use of the eyes was to seek the lessons of life through them and if they do not do so, then being deprived of eyes is much better than being blessed with them.

The words وَلِسَانًا وَشَفَتَيْنِ mean that people have also been blessed with a tongue and two lips in addition to the eyes mentioned earlier. The reason

8. Have We not given him two eyes and a tongue and two lips and not shown him the two ways?

for blessing a person with them is that after seeing and feeling the deprivation around him, he not only takes practical steps to rectify it but urges others also to do so. His urging and exhortation would then become instrumental in others adopting virtue also. In the previous *sūrah*, this aspect is pointed out in the verse: وَلَا تَحَاضُّونَ عَلَى طَعَامِ الْمَسْكِينِ (١٨:٨٩) (and do not urge one another to feed the poor, (89:18)) and in this *sūrah*, the verse ثُمَّ كَانَ مِنَ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَتَوَاصَوْا بِالصَّبْرِ وَتَوَاصَوْا بِالْمَرْحَمَةِ (then he be of those who accepted faith and who counseled one another to be patient and sympathetic) serves a similar purpose.

Another thing which becomes evident from this verse is that the awareness of virtue in a person should entail that he should not only adopt that virtue himself but also urge others to do so as well. This is included in his obligation otherwise his virtuous deed will in fact be incomplete. Urging others to adopt virtue is the responsibility of every individual of the society without which he will be held accountable before the Almighty. In Sūrah ‘Aṣr, a thorough treatment will be given to this subject under the verse (١٠٣:٣-١) وَتَوَاصَوْا بِالْحَقِّ وَتَوَاصَوْا بِالصَّبْرِ (and exhorted one another to the truth and exhorted one another to patience, (103:1-3)).

Here a secondary aspect is also worth consideration: the tongue is mentioned with two lips which actually protect it from above and below. The principle is that the more valuable and capable of producing profound, effective and far-reaching results a thing is the more it is protected and safeguarded so that it is secured from any carelessness or negligence in using it. A person’s tongue is one of his most valuable and effective weapons. It is a sharp-edged sword. For this reason, it has been handed over to man in a sheath so that he should only unsheathe it where required and for the purpose it has been given to him by God. It is highly unfortunate that people instead of using it for the right purpose use it for trivial tasks.

The sentence وَهَدَيْنَاهُ النَّجْدَيْنِ refers to the fact that besides blessing man with the faculty of sight, intellect and speech the Almighty has also guided him regarding the two paths – the two paths which are mentioned in Sūrah Dahr in the following words:

إِنَّا هَدَيْنَاهُ السَّبِيلَ إِمَّا شَاكِرًا وَإِمَّا كَفُورًا (٣:٧٦)

We showed him the path. If he wants, he can be grateful or ungrateful. (76:3)

The words of Sūrah Shams are even more clear:

وَتَنْفِيسٍ وَمَا سَوَّاهَا فَأَلْهَمَهَا فُجُورَهَا وَتَقْوَاهَا (٩١: ٧-٨)

And the soul bears witness and the perfection given to it. Therefore [We] inspired it with its evil and its good.⁹ (91:7-10)

No different to this is the explanation I have proffered in Sūrah Qiyāmah that the liking of good and the disliking of evil is ordained in human nature. If a person does evil, it is not because he does not possess the awareness of good and evil, it is because he is overcome by emotions knowing full well that he is committing evil.

فَلَا اقْتَحَمَ الْعَقَبَةَ (١١) وَمَا أَدْرَاكَ مَا الْعَقَبَةُ (١٢)¹⁰

This is a statement of the lack of acknowledgment of the favours of God and the ungratefulness of the addressees. If the Almighty had blessed them with the faculties of intellect and speech and with guidance, they owed some obligation to these favours: they should have tried to surmount the difficulties which came their way in showing compassion and sympathy to God's creation, in having themselves included in the list of the near ones of the Almighty and in achieving the blissful state of their being pleased with God and He being pleased with them. However, because of their greed and spinelessness they did not have the courage to do so: their wealth restrained them.

The word عَقَبَةٌ means "a steep path" and اقْتِحَامٌ means "to climb a slope" or "to do a difficult task". Here this word refers to commendable acts of virtue which relate to showing sympathy to God's creation and to serving the Almighty. Examples are forthcoming. Since, in order to undertake these acts of virtue, a person needs to make sacrifice which weighs down heavily on him hence this is called "surmounting the steep path" by the Qur'ān. Here the phenomenon to which I have referred to at many places in this *tafsīr* should be kept in consideration that since in order to achieve all the higher objectives of life, one needs to divert one's inner-self from deeds which bring immediate benefits and drive it in a totally different direction, this weighs down heavily on it. On the other hand, trivial undertakings produce immediate benefits and one's soul is easily inclined to them. Jesus (sws) has explained this by saying: "Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that

9. There is an obvious oversight here by the author whilst translating the word فَأَلْهَمَهَا with God as the speaker in the plural. It should be: "and God inspired it with its good and evil." (Translator)

10. But he did not surmount the steep path. And what have you understood what this steep path is?

leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.” (Matthew, 7:13-14). The narrative¹¹ حَقَّتِ الْجَنَّةُ بِالْمَكَارِهِ (Paradise is surrounded by hardships) also refers to this very aspect.

I have also explained the style found in the verse وَمَا أَذْرَاكَ مَا الْعَقَبَةُ. Such a question is posed to express the majesty or dread of something. The implication of the verse is to inform the addressees that they are dreaming to become the near and favourite ones of the Almighty merely by observing certain rites whereas attaining this position requires the surmounting of steep paths and showing valour and bravery in life; these addressees are avaricious and the avaricious can never attain this position; if they want to do so, then what they must do is spelled out in the next verses.

فَكَ رَقَبَةٍ (١٣) أَوْ إِطْعَامٌ فِي يَوْمٍ ذِي مَسْغَبَةٍ (١٤) يَتِيمًا ذَا مَقْرَبَةٍ (١٥) أَوْ مَسْكِينًا ذَا مَتْرَبَةٍ (١٦)¹²

The first of the mentioned things is liberating a slave. Here it should be kept in consideration that since these verses belong to the initial Makkan period, the Arabs are addressed by the general word “man” and whatever has been required of them also relates to what is universal and what is obvious with regard to human nature. I have already alluded to this aspect in the introduction of this *sūrah*. Liberating a slave and making an effort that others also do so is something which is regarded as a virtue by every sensible person. The Arabs too regarded it to be a great act of virtue. The Qur’ān in its very initial phase of preaching placed this act of human service at the top of all virtues. At that time, other people of the world were yet to have an awareness of this virtue. I have already explained in the *tafsīr* of Sūrah Nūr how from the very beginning the Qur’ān urged and exhorted people to adopt it and how then it embarked upon a campaign to eliminate gradually the institution of slavery from the society.

After this, the verse mentions the feeding of the poor and the indigent. The verb إِطْعَامٌ is in its broader connotation and means to fulfil all the needs of such people. It is qualified by the phrase فِي يَوْمٍ ذِي مَسْغَبَةٍ (in days of famine) which is meant to increase the efficacy of the appeal. No doubt feeding the poor is a virtuous act; however, in days of famine its value increases greatly. Similar is the case of the qualifying phrase ذَا مَقْرَبَةٍ (near of kin) after the word يَتِيمًا (orphan). The implication is that every orphan deserves help; however, an orphan who is a relative is most

11. Muslim, *Al-Jāmi‘ al-ṣaḥīḥ*, vol. 4, 2174, (no. 2822).

12. Freeing of a slave or feeding, in days of famine, of an orphan near of kin or an indigent [down] in the dust.

worthy of help. No different is the case of the qualifying phrase *دَا مُتْرَبَةً* ([down] in the dust) after *مُسْكِينًا* (an indigent).

ثُمَّ كَانَ مِنَ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَتَوَاصَوْا بِالصَّبْرِ وَتَوَاصَوْا بِالْمَرْحَمَةِ (١٧)¹³

These verses state the next step that these people should undertake.

Those who are sensitive and whose eyes pick up the downtrodden around them are expected to observe the virtues spelled out above and should also be expected to be among those who embrace faith and among those who call people to show patience and to be sympathetic to their fellow human beings. If they are not able to do so, then this only means that there is some hurdle in their moral and spiritual development which they have not been able to overcome.

Here the word *مَرْحَمَةٍ* (sympathy) is mentioned together with *صَبْرٍ* (patience) the way *حَقٍّ* (truth) is mentioned together with *صَبْرٍ* (patience) in Sūrah ‘Aṣr. The reason for this is the nature of the deeds of virtue towards which I have referred to while explaining the expression *الْعَقَبَةُ افْتَحَمَ* in verse eleven: these deeds are generally against one’s inner desires and hence a person has to counter this obstacle while doing such deeds and it is like climbing a slope. Only those people can climb this slope who have the quality of patience in them. The real meaning of patience in Arabic is “perseverance and steadfastness”. Those who are devoid of this quality lack valour and bravery; hence, it was deemed necessary that those who have been urged to do virtuous deeds should also be urged to be patient and steadfast. More details to this will be furnished in the *tafsīr* of Sūrah ‘Aṣr inshallāh.

أُولَئِكَ أَصْحَابُ الْمَيْمَنَةِ (١٨) وَالَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا بِآيَاتِنَا هُمْ أَصْحَابُ الْمَشْأَمَةِ (١٩) عَلَيْهِمْ نَارٌ مُؤَصَّدَةٌ (٢٠)¹⁴

Here at the end, the fates of those who have the mettle to do the above mentioned deeds and those who do not are stated. There is an ellipsis of some words regarding the *aṣḥāb al-maymanah* as is evident from the contrasting words *عَلَيْهِمْ نَارٌ مُؤَصَّدَةٌ* regarding the *aṣḥāb al-mash‘amah*. The suppressed words are to the effect: they shall reside in the upper floors of the buildings of Paradise.

The origin of the word *مَيْمَنَةٍ* can be from *يَمِينٍ* (right) or from *يُمن*

13. then he be of those who accepted faith and who counselled one another to be patient and sympathetic.

14. These are the fortunate. And those who have denied Our revelations, it is they who are the unfortunate. The Fire shall close in on them.

(blessed and fortunate); since here it is mentioned in contrast to مَشَامَةٌ whose origin is شَوْم (misfortune and ill-fated) its origin must be regarded to be the word يُمْن. I have translated it accordingly. However, this difference is mere literal; it will not make any difference in the real purport of the discourse. The Qur'ān has called both these factions as أَصْحَابُ الْيَمِين (companions of the right hand) and أَصْحَابُ الشِّمَال (companions of the left hand). The reason behind these names has been mentioned in Sūrah Hāqqah: the pious will be given their account in their right hands and the impious will be given their account in their left hands. The only difference between both interpretations of the word is that one relates to the apparent and the other to the essence. Obviously, those who will be handed their accounts in their right hands will be the fortunate and lucky and those who will be handed their accounts in their left hands will be the unfortunate and ill-fated.

Consider now the verse: عَلَيْنَهُمْ نَارٌ مُّوصَدَّةٌ. The expression أَوْصَدَ الْبَاب means “he closed the door”. The implication was that they will be enveloped in fire and doors will close upon them. (May God save us from such a torment)

With the grace of God, I have come to the end of this *sūrah's tafsīr*.
فَلِلَّهِ الْحَمْد (To God is due all gratitude).

Lahore,

31st December, 1979 AD

11th Šafr, 1400, AH